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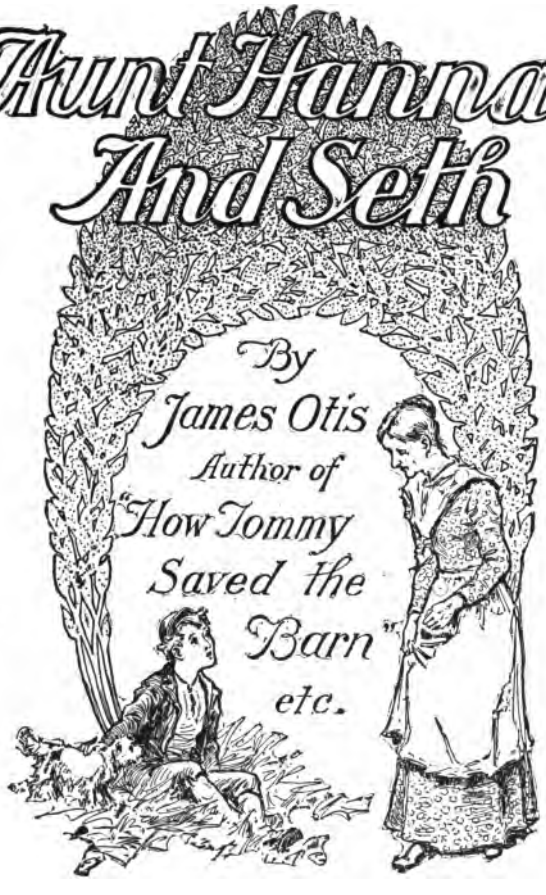
# Aunt Hannah And Seth



By
James Otis
Author of
"How Tommy
Saved the
Barn"
etc.

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NOV 19 FEB '36

# AUNT HANNAH.

## CHAPTER I.

### AN ADVERTISEMENT.

A SMALL boy with a tiny white dog in his arms stood near the New York approach to the Brooklyn Bridge on a certain June morning not many years since, gazing doubtfully at the living tide which flowed past him, as if questioning whether it might be safe to venture across the street.

Seth Barrows, otherwise known by his acquaintances as Limpy Seth, because of what they were pleased to speak of as "a pair of legs that weren't mates," was by no means dismayed by the bustle and apparent confusion everywhere around him. Such scenes were familiar, he having lived in the city, so far as he knew, from the day of his birth; but, owing to his slight lameness, it was not always a simple matter for him to cross the crowded streets.

"Hi, Limpy!" a shrill voice cried from amid the pedestrians in the distance, and as Seth looked quickly toward the direction from which had come the hail, he noted that a boy with hair of such a vivid hue of red as would attract particular attention from any person within whose range of vision he might come, was frantically trying to force a passage.

Seth stepped back to a partially sheltered position beneath the stairway of the overhead bridge, and awaited the coming of his friend.

"Out swellin', are you?" the boy with the red hair asked, as he finally approached, panting so heavily that it was with difficulty he could speak. "Goin' to give up business?"

"I got rid of my stock quite a while ago, an' counted on givin' Snip a chance to run in the park. The poor little duffer don't have much fun down at Mother Hyde's while I'm workin'."

"You might sell him for a pile of money, Limpy, an' he's a heap of bother for you," the new-comer said reflectively, as he stroked the dog's long, silken hair. "Teddy Dixon says he's got good blood in him——"

"Look here, Tim, do you think I'd sell Snip, no

matter how much money I might get for him? Why, he's the only relation I've got in all this world!" and the boy buried his face in the dog's white hair.

"It costs more to keep him than you put out for yourself."

"What of that? He thinks a heap of me, Snip does, an' he'd be as sorry as I would if anything happened to one of us."

"Yes, I reckon you are kind'er stuck on him! It's a pity, Limpy, 'cause you can't hustle same's the rest of us do, an' so don't earn as much money."

"Snip has what milk he needs——"

"An' half the time you feed him by goin' hungry yourself."

"What of that?" Seth cried sharply. "Don't I tell you we two are the only friends each other's got! I'd a good deal rather get along without things than let him go hungry, 'cause he wouldn't know why I couldn't feed him."

"A dog is only a dog, an' that's all you can make out of it. I ain't countin' but that Snip is better'n the general run, 'cause, as Teddy Dixon says, he's blooded; but just the same it don't stand to reason you should treat him like he was as good as you."

"He's a heap better'n I am, Tim Chandler! Snip never did a mean thing in his life, an' he's the same as a whole family to me."

As if understanding that he was the subject of the conversation, the dog pressed his cold nose against the boy's neck, and the latter cried triumphantly:

"There, look at that! If you didn't have any folks, Tim Chandler, an' couldn't get 'round same as other fellers do, don't you reckon his snugglin' up like this would make you love him?"

"He ain't really yours," Tim said after a brief pause, whereat the lame boy cried fiercely:

"What's the reason he ain't? Didn't I find him 'most froze to death more'n a year ago, an' haven't I kept him in good shape ever since? Of course he wasn't mine at first; but I'd like to see the chump who'd dare to say he belonged to anybody else! If you didn't own any more of a home than you could earn sellin' papers, an' if nobody cared the least little bit whether you was cold or hungry, you'd think it was mighty fine to have a chum like Snip. You ought'er see him when I come in after he's been shut up in the room all the forenoon! It seems like he'd jump out of his skin, he's so glad to see

me! I tell you, Tim, Snip loves me just like I was his mother!"

Master Chandler shook his head doubtfully, and appeared to be on the point of indulging some disparaging remark, when his attention was diverted by a lad on the opposite side of the street, who was making the most frantic gestures, and, as might be guessed by the movement of his lips, shouting at the full strength of his lungs; but the words were drowned by the rattle of vehicles and other noises of the street.

"There's Pip Smith, an' what do you s'pose he's got in his ear now?" Tim said speculatively; but with little apparent interest in the subject. "He's allers botherin' his head 'bout somethin' that ain't any of his business. He allows he'll be a detective when he gets big enough."

Seth gave more attention to the caresses Snip was bestowing upon him than to his acquaintance opposite, until Tim exclaimed, with a sudden show of excitement:

"He's yellin' for you, Seth! What's he swingin' that newspaper 'round his head for?"

Perhaps Tim might have become interested enough to venture across the street, had Master

Smith remained on the opposite side very long; but just at that moment the tide of travel slackened sufficiently to admit of a passage, and the excited Pip came toward his acquaintances at full speed.

"What kind of a game have you been up to, Limpy?" he demanded, waving the newspaper meanwhile.

Seth looked at the speaker in astonishment, but without making any reply.

"Anything gone wrong?" Tim asked, gazing inquiringly from one to the other.

"I don't know what he means," Seth replied, and Pip shouted wildly:

"Listen to him! You'd think butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, an' yet he's been ridin' a mighty high hoss, 'cordin' to all I can find out!"

"Who?" Seth demanded, grown restive under Pip's accusing gaze.

"You, of course!"

"But I haven't been up to any game."

"You can't stuff me with that kind of talk, 'cause I've got it down here in black an' white."

"Got what down?" Tim asked impatiently. "If there's anything wrong, why don't you come out with it like a man, an' not stand there like a dummy?"

"Seth Barrows will find there's somethin' wrong when the whole perlice force of this city gets after him," Pip replied, in what was very like a threatening tone. "Listen to this, Tim Chandler, an' try to figger out the kind of a game Limpy's been playin'!"

Then, with a tragical air, Master Smith read slowly from the newspaper he had been brandishing, the following advertisement:

"INFORMATION WANTED of a boy calling himself Seth Barrows. Said boy is about eleven years old; his left leg an inch shorter than the right, and is known to have been living in Jersey City three years ago. He then sold newspapers for a livelihood, and resided with one Richard Genet. A liberal reward will be paid for any information concerning him. Address Symonds & Symonds, Attorneys-at-law."

As he ceased reading, Master Smith looked at his companions with a certain gleam of triumph in his eyes; but this expression quickly changed to one of severe reproof as he met Seth's bewildered gaze.

"Sellin' papers is good enough for me, though it ain't a business that brings in any too much money," he said sharply. "But I don't keep a fancy dog, so the cost of livin' ain't so high."

"What does it mean?" Seth asked in a low tone, as he gazed alternately at Tim and Pip.

"Mean?" the latter replied scornfully. "I reckon you can answer that better'n we could. When the bank on Broadway was broke into there was the same kind of notice in the papers, for I saw it with my own eyes."

"But I haven't been breakin' into any bank!" Seth wailed, hugging Snip yet more tightly to his bosom.

"Then what's that advertisement there for?" and Master Smith looked upon his acquaintance with an air of judicial severity.

"How do I know?"

Now it was Tim's turn to gaze at Seth reproachfully; and as the three stood there one and another of their acquaintances, having heard the startling news, came up eagerly curious and positive that Snip's master had committed some terrible crime.

The lame boy gave ample token of mental distress, as well he might after hearing that two attorneys-at-law were desirous of finding him, and more than one of the throng set down the expression of trouble on his face as strong proof of guilt.

Although conscious that he had committed no crime, the boy was thoroughly alarmed at being

thus advertised for. He knew that rewards were offered for information which would lead to the apprehension of criminals, and never so much as dreamed that similar methods might be employed in a search for those who were innocent.

There was no reason, so he might have said to himself, why any lawyer in the city of New York would care to see him, unless he had been accused of some crime, but as he revolved the matter in his mind terror took possession of him until all power of reflection had departed.

The number of alleged friends or acquaintances had increased, until Seth and Snip were literally surrounded, and every member of the throng knew full well that the gathering would be rudely dispersed by the first policeman who chanced to come that way. Therefore it was that each fellow hastened to give his opinion as to the reason why the advertisement had been inserted in the columns of the paper, and, with five or six boys speaking at the same moment, it can well be understood that no one of them succeeded in making any very great impression upon the minds of his neighbors.

Seth understood, however, that every boy present was agreed upon the supposed fact that a great crime

had been committed, although these young merchants might, upon due reflection, come to realize how improbable was such a supposition.

When little Snip, seeming to understand that his master was in sore distress, licked the boy's cheek, it was to Seth almost as if the dog shared in the belief of those who were so ready to accuse him, and he could restrain his feelings no longer.

Leaning against the iron column which supported the staircase, with his face buried in Snip's silky hair, the crippled lad gave way to tears, while his companions gazed at him severely, for to their minds this show of grief was much the same as a confession of guilt.

A blue-coated guardian of the peace dispersed the throng before those composing it had had time to make audible comment upon this last evidence of an accusing conscience; but Seth was so bowed down by bewilderment, sorrow, and fear as not to know that he stood alone with Snip, while a throng of acquaintances gazed at him from the opposite side of the street.

Once the officer had passed on, and was at a respectful distance, Seth's friends returned, and it could be understood from their manner that some

definite plan of action had been decided upon during the enforced absence.

"See here, Seth, we ain't such chumps as to jump on a feller when he's down. If you don't want to tell us what you've been doin'——"

"I haven't done a thing, an' you know it, Tim Chandler," the lad moaned, speaking with difficulty because of his sobs.

"Then what's the notice about?" Tim asked in a severe, yet friendly tone.

"I don't know any more'n you do."

"Where's the lead nickel Mickey Dowd says somebody shoved on you the other day?" Teddy Dixon asked sharply.

Seth raised his head, looked about him for a moment as a shadow of fear passed over his face, and, dropping Snip for an instant, plunged both hands deep in his trousers pockets.

Withdrawing them he displayed a small collection of silver and copper coins, which he turned over eagerly, his companions crowding yet more closely to assure themselves that the examination was thorough.

"It's gone!" Seth cried shrilly. "It's gone; but I'll cross my throat if I knew I was passin' it!"

Snip, hearing his young master's cry of fear, stood on his hind feet, scratching and clawing to attract attention, and, hardly conscious of what he did, Seth took the little fellow in his arms once more.

"That settles the whole business," Teddy Dixon cried, in the tone of one who has made an important discovery. "You shoved it on somebody who'd been lookin' for counterfeit money, an' now the detectives are after you!"

Seth glanced quickly and apprehensively around, as if fearing the officers of the law were already close upon him, and the seeming mystery was unravelled.

From that moment there was not even the shadow of a doubt in the minds of Seth's acquaintances, and, believing that he had not intended to commit such a grave crime, the sympathies of all were aroused.

"You've got to skip mighty quick," Tim said, after a brief pause, during which each lad had looked at his neighbor as if asking what could be done to rescue the threatened boy.

"Where'll I go?" Seth cried tearfully. "They know what my name is, an' there ain't much use for me to hide."

"You can bet I wouldn't hang 'round here many seconds," one of the group said, in a low tone, glancing around to make certain his words were not overheard by the minions of the law. "If we fellers keep our mouths shut, an' you sneak off into the country somewhere, I don't see how anybody could find you!"

"But where'd I go?" Seth asked, his tears checked by the great fear which came with the supposed knowledge of what he had done.

"Anywhere. Here's Snip all ready to take a journey for his health, an' in ten minutes you'll be out of the city; but it ain't safe to hang 'round thinkin' of it very long, for the detectives will be runnin' their legs off tryin' to earn the money that's promised by the advertisement."

Seth made no reply, and his most intimate friends understood that if he was to be saved from prison the time had arrived when they must act without waiting for his decision.

They held a hurried consultation, while Seth stood caressing Snip, without being really conscious of what he did, and then Teddy and Tim ranged themselves either side of the culprit who had unwittingly brought himself under the ban of the law.

Seizing him by the arms they forced the lad forward in the direction of Broadway, Tim saying hoarsely to those who gave token of their intention to follow:

"You fellers must keep away, else the cops will know we're up to somethin' crooked. Wait here, an' me an' Teddy'll come back as soon as we've taken care of Seth."

This injunction was not obeyed without considerable grumbling on the part of the more curious, and but for the efforts of two or three of the wiser heads, the fugitive and his accomplices would have aroused the suspicions of the dullest policeman in the city.

"You'll get yourselves into a heap of trouble if anybody knows you helped me to run away," Seth said, in a tone of faint remonstrance.

"It can't be helped," Teddy replied firmly, urging the hunted boy to a faster pace. "We ain't goin' to stand by an' see you lugged off to jail while there's a show of our doin' anything. Keep your eye on Snip so's he won't bark, an' we'll look after the rest of the business."

Even if Seth had been averse to running away from the possible danger which threatened, he would have been forced to continue the flight so lately

begun, because of the energy displayed by his friends.

Tim and Teddy literally dragged him along, crossing the street at one point to avoid a policeman, and again dodging into a friendly doorway when the guardians of the peace came upon them suddenly.

Had any one observed particularly the movements of these three lads, the gravest suspicions must have been awakened, for they displayed a consciousness of guilt in every movement, and showed plainly that their great desire was to escape scrutiny.

Seth was so enveloped in sorrow and fear as to be ignorant of the direction in which he and Snip were being forced. He understood dimly that those who had the business of escape in hand were bent on gaining the river; but to more than that he gave no heed.

Finally, when they were arrived at a ferry-slip, Teddy paid the passage money, and Seth was led to the forward end of the boat, in order, as Tim explained, that he might be ready to jump ashore instantly the pier on the opposite side was gained, in case the officers of justice had tracked them thus far.

Now, forced to remain inactive for a certain time,

Seth's friends took advantage of the opportunity to give him what seemed to be much-needed advice.

"The minute the boat strikes the dock you must take a sneak," Teddy said impressively, clutching Seth vigorously by the shoulder to insure attention. "We'll hang 'round here to make sure the detectives haven't got on to your trail, an' then we'll go back."

"But what am I to do afterward?" Seth asked helplessly.

"There ain't any need of very much guessin' about that. You're bound to get where there'll be a chance of hidin', an' you want to be mighty lively."

"Snip an' I will have to earn money enough to keep us goin', an' how can it be done while I'm hidin'?"

"How much have you got now?"

"'Bout fifty cents."

Tim drew from his pocket a handful of coins, mostly pennies, and, retaining only three cents with which to pay his return passage on the ferry-boat, forced them upon the fugitive, saying when the boy remonstrated:

"You'll need it all, an' I can hustle a little livelier to-night, or borrow from some of the other fellers if trade don't show up as it ought'er."

Teddy followed his comrade's example, paying no heed to Seth's expostulations, save as he said:

"We're bound to give you a lift, old man, so don't say anything more about it. If you was the only feller in this city what had passed a lead nickel, perhaps this thing would look different to me; but the way I reckon it is, that the man what put the advertisement in the paper jest 'cause he'd been done out'er five cents is a mighty poor citizen, an' I stand ready to do all I can towards keepin' you away from him."

"Look here, fellers," Seth cried in what was very like despair as the steamer neared the dock, "I don't know what to do, even after you've put up all your money. Where can Snip an' I go? We've got to earn our livin', an' I don't see how it's to be done if we're bound to hide all the time."

"That's easy enough," and Tim spoke hopefully. "The city is a fool alongside the country, an' I'm countin' on your havin' a reg'lar snap after you get settled down. When we land, you're to strike right out, an' keep on goin' till you're where there's nothin' but farms with milk, an' pie, an' stuff to eat layin' 'round loose for the first feller what comes to pick 'em up. Pip Smith says farmers don't do much

of anything but fill theirselves with good things, an' I've allers wanted to try my hand with 'em for one summer."

Seth shook his head doubtfully. Although he had never been in the country, it did not seem reasonable that the picture drawn by Pip Smith was truthful, otherwise every city boy would turn farmer's assistant, rather than remain where it cost considerable labor to provide themselves withfood and a shelter.

"You'll strike it rich somewhere," Teddy said, with an air of conviction, "an' then you can sneak back long enough to tell us where you're hangin' out. I'll work down 'round the markets for a spell, an' p'rhaps I'll see some of the hayseeders you've run across."

The conversation was brought to a close abruptly as the ferry-boat entered the dock with many a bump and reel against the heavy timbers; and Seth, with Snip hugged tightly to his bosom, pressed forward to the gates that he might be ready to leap ashore instantly they were opened.

"Keep your upper lip stiff, an' don't stop, once you've started, till you're so far from New York that the detectives can't find you," Tim whispered

encouragingly, and ten seconds later the fugitive was running at full speed up the gangway, Snip barking shrilly at the throng on either side.

Tim and Teddy followed their friend to the street beyond the ticket office, and there stood watching until he had disappeared from view. Then the latter said, with a long-drawn sigh :

"I wish it had been almost any other feller what passed the lead nickel, for Seth hasn't got sand enough to do what's needed, if he counts on keepin' out'er jail." And Tim replied sadly:

"If a feller stuck me with a counterfeit I'd think I had a right to shove it along; but after all this scrape I'll keep my eyes open mighty wide, else it may be a case of the country for me, an' I ain't hankerin' after livin' on a farm, even if Pip Smith does think it's sich a soft snap."

Then the friends of the fugitives returned to the ferry-boat, in order that they might without delay make a report to those acquaintances whom they knew would be eagerly waiting, as to how Seth had fared at the outset of his flight.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE COUNTRY.

SETH had little idea as to the direction he had taken, save that the street led straight away from the water, and surely he must come into the country finally by pursuing such a course.

Neither time nor distance gave him relief of mind; it was much as if flight served to increase the fear in his mind, and even after having come to the suburbs of the city he looked over his shoulder apprehensively from time to time, almost expecting to see the officers of the law in hot pursuit.

If it had been possible for Snip to understand the situation fully, he could not have behaved with more discretion, according to his master's views.

Instead of begging to be let down that he might enjoy a frolic on the green grass, he remained passive in Seth's arms, pressing his nose up to the lad's neck now and then as if expressing sympathy. The little fellow did not so much as whine when they

passed rapidly by a cool-looking, bubbling stream, even though his tongue was lolling out, red and dripping with perspiration; but Seth understood that his pet would have been much refreshed with a drink of the running water, and said, in a soothing, affectionate tone:

"I don't dare to stop yet a while, Snippey dear, for nobody knows how near the officers may be, and you had better go thirsty a little longer, than be kicked out into the street when I'm locked up in jail."

A big lump came into the fugitive's throat at the picture he had drawn, and the brook was left far behind before he could force it down sufficiently to speak.

Then the two were come to a small shop, in the windows of which were displayed a variety of wares, from slate pencils to mint drops, and here Seth halted irresolutely.

He had continued at a rapid pace, and fully an hour was passed since he parted from his friends. He was both hungry and weary; there were but few buildings to be seen ahead, and, so he argued with himself, this might be his last opportunity to purchase anything which would serve as food until he

was launched into that wilderness known to him as "the country."

No person could be seen in either direction, and Seth persuaded himself that it might be safe to halt here for so long a time as would be necessary to select something from the varied stock to appease hunger, and at the same time be within his limited means.

For the first moment since leaving the ferry-slip he allowed Snip to slip out of his arms; but caught him up again very quickly as the dog gave strong evidence of a desire to spend precious time in a frolic.

"You must wait a spell longer, Snippey dear," he muttered. "We may have to run for it, an' I mightn't have a chance to get you in my arms again. It would be terrible if the officers got hold of you, an' I'm afraid they'd try it for the sake of catchin' me, 'cause everybody knows I wouldn't leave you, no matter what happened."

Then Seth stole softly into the shop, as if fearing to awaken the suspicion of the proprietor by a bold approach, and once inside, gazed quickly around.

Two or three early, unwholesome-looking apples and a jar of ginger cakes made up the list of eatables, and his decision was quickly made.

"How many of them cakes will you sell for five cents?" he asked timidly of the slovenly woman who was embroidering an odd green flower on a small square of soiled and faded red silk.

She looked at him listlessly, and then gazed at the cakes meditatively.

"I don't know the price of them. This shop isn't mine; I'm tendin' it for a friend."

"Then you can't sell things?" and Seth turned to go, fearing lest he had already loitered too long.

"Oh, dear, yes, that's what I'm here for; but I never had a customer for cakes, an' to tell the truth I don't believe one of 'em has been sold for a month. Do you know what they are worth?"

"The bakers sell a doughnut as big as three of them for a cent, an' throw in an extra one if they're stale."

The lady deposited her embroidery on a sheet of brown paper which covered one end of the counter, and surveyed the cakes.

"It seems to me that a cent for three of them would be a fair price," she said at length, after having broken one in order to gain some idea of its age.

"Have you got anything else to eat?"

"That candy is real good, especially the checkerberry sticks, but perhaps you rather have somethin' more fillin'."

"I'll take five cents' worth of cakes," Seth said hurriedly, for it seemed as if he had been inside the shop a very long while.

The amateur clerk set about counting the stale dainties in a businesslike way; but at that instant Snip came into view from behind his master, and she ceased the task at once to cry in delight:

"What a dear little dog! Did he come with you?"

"Yes, ma'am," Seth replied hesitatingly; and he added as the woman stooped to caress Snip: "We're in a big hurry, an' if you'll give me the cakes I'll thank you."

"Dear me, why didn't you say so at first?" and she resumed her task of counting the cakes, stopping now and then to speak to Snip, who was sitting up on his hind legs begging for a bit of the stale pastry. "How far are you going?"

"I don't know; you see we can't walk very fast."

"Got friends out this way, I take it?"

"Well,—yes—no—that is, I don't know. Won't you please hurry?"

The woman seemed to think it necessary she should feed Snip with a portion of one cake that had already been counted out for Seth, and to still further tempt the dog's appetite by giving him an inch or more broken from one of the checkerberry sticks, before attending to her duties as clerk, after which she concluded her portion of the transaction by holding out a not over-cleanly hand for the money.

Seth hurriedly gave her five pennies, and then, seizing Snip in his arms, ran out of the shop regardless of the questions she literally hurled after him.

His first care was to gaze down the road in the direction from which he had just come, and the relief of mind was great when he failed to see any signs of life.

"They haven't caught up with us yet, Snippey," he said, as if certain the officers were somewhere in the rear bent on taking him prisoner. "If they stop at the store, that woman will be sure to say we were here."

Having thus spurred himself on, he continued the journey half an hour longer, when they had arrived at a grove of small trees and bushes through which ran a tiny brook.

"We can hide in here, an' you'll have a chance to run around on the grass till you're tired," he said, as, after making certain there was no one in sight to observe his movements, he darted amid the shrubbery.

It was not difficult for a boy tired as was Seth, to find a rest-inviting spot by the side of the stream where the bushes hid him from view of any who might chance to pass along the road, and without loss of time Snip set himself the task of chasing every butterfly that dared come within his range of vision, ceasing only for a few seconds at a time to lick his master's hand, or take his share of the stale pastry.

It was most refreshing to Seth, this halt beneath the shade of the bushes where the brook sang such a song as he had never heard before, and despite the age of the cake his hunger was appeased. Save for the haunting fear that the officers of the law might be close upon his heels, he would have been very happy, and even under the painful circumstances attending his departure, he enjoyed in a certain degree the unusual scene before him.

Then Snip, wearied with his fruitless pursuit of the butterflies, crept close by his master's side for a

nap, and Seth yielded to the temptation to stretch himself out at full length on the soft, cool moss.

There was in his mind the thought that he must resume the flight within a short time, lest he fail to find a shelter before the night had come; but the dancing waters sang a most entrancing and rest-inviting melody until his eyes closed despite his efforts to hold them open, and master and dog were wrapped in slumber.

The birds gathered on the branches above the heads of the sleepers, gazing down curiously and with many an inquiring twitter, as if asking whether this boy was one who would do them a mischief if it lay in his power, and the butterflies flaunted their gaudy wings within an inch of Snip's eyes; but the slumber was not broken.

The sun had no more than an hour's time remaining before his day's work in that particular section of the country had come to an end, when a brown moth fluttered down upon Seth's nose, where he sat pluming his wings in such an energetic manner that the boy suddenly sneezed himself into wakefulness, while Snip leaped up with a chorus of shrill barks and yelps which nearly threw the curious birds into hysterics.

"It's almost sunset, Snippey dear, an' we've been idlin' here when we ought'er been huntin' for a house where we can stay till mornin'. It's fine, I know," he added, as he took the tiny dog in his arms; "but I don't believe it would be very jolly to hang 'round in such a place all night. Besides, who knows but there are bears? We must be a terrible long way in the country, an' if the farmers are as good as Pip Smith tells about, we can get a chance to sleep in a house."

The fear that the officers might be close upon his heels had fled; it seemed as if many, many hours had passed since he took leave of Tim and Teddy, and it was possible the representatives of law would not pursue him so far into the country.

He had yet on hand a third of the stale cakes, and with these in his pocket as token that he would not go supperless to bed, and Snip on his arm, he resumed the flight once more.

After a brisk walk of half an hour, still on a course directly away from the river, as he believed, Seth began to look about him for a shelter during the night.

"We'll stop at the first house that looks as if the folks who live in it might be willin' to help two

fellers like us along, an' ask if we can stay all night," he said to Snip, speaking in a more cheery tone than he had indulged in since the fear-inspiring advertisement had been brought to his attention.

He did not adhere strictly to this plan, however, for when he was come to a farmhouse which had seemed to give token of sheltering generous people, a big black dog ran out of the yard growling and snapping, much to Snippey's alarm, and Seth hurried on at full speed.

"That wouldn't be any place for you, young man," he said, patting the dog's head. "We'll sleep out of doors rather than have you scared half to death!"

Ten minutes later he knocked at the door of a house, and, on making his request to a surly-looking man, was told that they "had no use for tramps."

Seth did not stop to explain that he could not rightly be called a tramp; but ran onward as if fearful lest the farmer might pursue to punish him for daring to ask such a favor.

Three times within fifteen minutes did he ask in vain for a shelter, and then his courage had oozed out at his fingers' ends.

"If Pip Smith was here he'd see that there ain't much milk an' pie layin' 'round to be picked up, an'

it begins to look, Snippey, as if we'd better stayed down there by the brook."

Master Snip growled as if to say that he too believed they had made a mistake in pushing on any farther, and the sun hid his face behind the hills as a warning for young boys and small dogs to get under cover.

Seth was discouraged, and very nearly frightened. He began to fear that he might get himself and Snip into serious trouble by any further efforts at finding a charitably disposed farmer, and after the shadows of night had begun to lengthen until every bush and rock was distorted into some hideous or fantastic shape, he was standing opposite a small barn adjoining a yet smaller dwelling.

No light could be seen from the building; it was as if the place had been deserted, and such a state of affairs seemed more promising to Seth than any he had seen.

"If the people are at home, an' we ask them to let us stay all night, we'll be driven away; so s'pose we creep in there, an' at the first show of mornin' we'll be off. It can't do any harm for us to sleep in a barn when the folks don't know it."

The barking of a dog in the distance caused him

to decide upon a course of action very quickly, and in the merest fraction of time he was inside the building, groping around the main floor on which had been thrown a sufficient amount of hay to provide a dozen boys with a comfortable bed.

He could hear some animal munching its supper a short distance away, and this sound robbed the gloomy interior of half its imaginary terrors.

Promising himself that he would leave the place before the occupants of the house were stirring next morning, Seth made his bed by burrowing into the hay, and, with Snip nestling close by his side, was soon ready for another nap.

The fugitive had taken many steps during his flight, and, despite the slumber indulged in by the side of the brook, his eyes were soon closed in profound sleep.

Many hours later the shrill barking of Snip awakened Seth, and he sat bolt upright on the hay, rubbing his sleepy eyes as if trying to prove that those useful members had deceived him in some way.

The rays of the morning sun were streaming in through the open door in a golden flood, and with the radiance came sweet odors borne by the gentle breeze.

Seth gave no heed just at that moment to the wondrous beauties of nature to be seen on every hand, when even the rough barn was gilded and perfumed, for standing in the doorway, as if literally petrified with astonishment, was a motherly looking little woman whose upraised hands told of bewilderment and surprise, while from the expression on her face one could almost have believed that she was really afraid of the tiny Snip.

"Is that animal dangerous, little boy?" she asked nervously after a brief but, to Seth, painful pause.

"Who—what animal? Oh, you mean Snip? Why, he couldn't harm anybody if he tried, an', besides, he wouldn't hurt a fly. He always barks when strange folks come near where I am, so's to make me think he's a watch-dog. Do you own this barn?"

"Yes—that is to say, it has always belonged to the Morses, an' there are none left now except Gladys an' me."

"I hope you won't be mad 'cause I came in here last night. I counted on gettin' away before you waked up; but the bed was so soft that it ain't any wonder I kept right on sleepin'."

"Have you been here all night?" the little woman

asked in surprise, advancing a pace now that Snip had decided there was no longer any necessity for him to continue the shrill outcries.

"I didn't have any place to sleep; there wasn't a light to be seen in your house. Well, to tell the truth, I was afraid I'd be driven away, same's I had been at the other places, so sneaked in——"

"Aunt Hannah! Aunt Hannah!"

It was a sweet, clear, childish voice which thus interrupted the conversation, and the little woman said nervously, as she glanced suspiciously at Snip:

"I wish you would hold your dog, little boy. That is Gladys, an' she's so reckless that I'm in fear of her life every minute she is near strange animals."

Seth did not have time to comply with this request before a pink-cheeked little miss of about his own age came dancing into the barn like a June wind, which burdens itself with the petals of the early roses.

"Oh, Aunt Hannah! Why, where in the world did that little boy— What a perfectly lovely dog! Oh, you dear!"

This last exclamation was called forth by Master Snip himself, who bounded forward with every show

of joy, and stood erect on his hind feet with both forepaws raised as if asking to be taken in her arms.

"Don't, Gladys! You mustn't touch that animal, for nobody knows whether he may not be ferocious."

The warning came too late. Gladys already had Snip in her arms, and as the little fellow struggled to lick her cheek in token of his desire to be on friendly terms, she said laughingly:

"You poor, foolish Aunt Hannah! To think that a mite of a dog like this one could ever be ferocious! Isn't he a perfect beauty? I never saw such a dear!"

The little woman hovered helplessly around much like a sparrow whose fledglings are in danger. She feared lest the dog should do the child a mischief, and yet dared not come so near as to rescue her from the imaginary danger.

There was just a tinge of jealousy in Seth's heart as he gazed at Snip's demonstrations of affection for this stranger. It seemed as if he had suddenly lost his only friend, and, at that moment, it was the greatest misfortune that could befall him.

Gladys was so occupied with the dog as to be

unconscious of Aunt Hannah's anxiety. She admired Snip's silky hair; declared that he needed a bath, and insisted on knowing how "such a treasure" had come into Seth's possession.

The boy was not disposed to admit that he had no real claim upon the dog, save such as might result from having found him homeless and friendless in the street; but willing that the girl should admire his pet yet more.

"Put him on the floor an' see how much he knows," Seth said, without replying to her question.

Then Snip was called upon to show his varied accomplishments. He sat bolt upright holding a wisp of straw in his mouth; walked on his hind feet with Seth holding him by one paw; whirled around and around on being told to dance; leaped over the handle of the hay-fork, barking and yelping with excitement; and otherwise gave token of being very intelligent.

Gladys was in an ecstasy of delight, and even the little woman so far overcame her fear of animals as to venture to touch Snip's outstretched paw when he gravely offered to "shake hands."

Not until at least a quarter of an hour had passed was any particular attention paid to Seth, and by

this time Aunt Hannah was willing to admit that while dogs in general frightened her, however peaceable they appeared to be, she thought a little fellow like Snip might be almost as companionable as a cat.

"Of course you won't continue your journey until after breakfast," she said in a matter-of-fact tone, "and Gladys will take you into the kitchen where you can wash your face and hands, while I am milking."

Then it was that Seth observed a bright tin pail and a three-legged stool lying on the ground just outside the big door, as if they had fallen from the little woman's hands when she was alarmed by hearing Snip's note of defiance and warning.

Gladys had the dog in her arms, and nodding to Seth as if to say he should follow, she led the way to the house, while Aunt Hannah disappeared through a doorway opening from the main portion of the barn.

"There's the towel, the soap and water," she said, pointing toward a wooden sink in one corner of what was to Seth the most wonderful kitchen he had ever seen. "Don't you think Snippey would like some milk?"

"I'm certain he would," Seth replied promptly. "He hasn't had anything except dry ginger cake since yesterday mornin'."

A moment later Master Snip had before him a saucer filled with such milk as it is safe to say he had not seen since Seth took him in charge, and the eager way in which he lapped it showed that it was appreciated fully.

The fugitive did not make his toilet immediately, because of the irresistible temptation to gaze about him.

The walls of the kitchen were low; but in the newcomer's eyes this was an added attraction, because it gave to the room such an hospitable appearance. The floor was more cleanly than any table he had ever seen; the bricks of the fireplace, at one side of which stood a small cook-stove, were as red as if newly painted; while on the dresser and the mantel across the broad chimney were tin dishes that shone like newly polished silver.

A large rocking-chair, a couch covered with chintz, and half a dozen straight-backed, spider-legged chairs were ranged methodically along the sides of the room, while in the centre of the floor, so placed that the fresh morning breeze which entered by the

door would blow straight across it to the window shaded by lilac bushes, was a table covered with a snowy cloth.

"Well, if this is a farmer's house I wouldn't wonder if a good bit of Pip Smith's yarn was true," Seth muttered to himself, as he turned toward the sink, over which hung a towel so white that he could hardly believe he would be allowed to dry his face and hands with it.

He was alone in the kitchen. Snip, having had a most satisfactory breakfast of what he must have believed was real cream, had run out of doors to chase a leaf blown by the wind, and Gladys was close behind, alternately urging him in the pursuit, and showering praises upon "the sweetest dog that ever lived."

"Folks that live like this must be mighty rich," Seth thought, as he plunged his face into a basin of clear water. "It ain't likely Snip an' me will strike it so soft again, an' I expect he'll be terrible sorry to leave. I reckon it'll be all right to hang 'round an hour or so, an' then we must get out lively. I wonder if that little bit of a woman expects I'll pay for breakfast?"

## CHAPTER III.

### AUNT HANNAH.

WITH a broken comb, which he used upon Snip's hair as well as his own, Seth concluded his toilet, and, neither the little woman nor the girl having returned to the house, stood in the doorway gazing out upon as peaceful a scene as a boy pursued by the officers of the law could well desire to see.

On either hand ran the dusty road, not unlike a yellow ribbon upon a cloth of green, and bordering it here and there were clumps of bushes or groves of pine or of oak, as if planted for the especial purpose of affording to the weary traveller a screen from the blinding sun.

The little farmhouse stood upon the height of a slight elevation from which could be had a view of the country round about on either hand; and although so near to the great city, there were no settlements, villages, or towns to be seen.

Surely, the lad said to himself, he had at last arrived at "the country," and if all houses were as

hospitable-looking, as cleanly, and as inviting in appearance as was this one, then Pip Smith's story had in it considerably more than a grain of truth.

"It must be mighty nice to have money enough to live in a place like this," Seth said to himself. "It would please Snip way down to the ground; but I mustn't think of it, 'cause there's no chance for a feller like me to earn a livin' here, an' we can't always count on folks givin' us what we need to eat."

Then Aunt Hannah came out from the barn, carrying in one hand a glistening tin pail filled with foaming milk, and in the other the three-legged stool.

Seth ran toward her and held out his hand as if believing she would readily yield at least a portion of her burden; but she shook her head smiling.

"Bless your heart, my child, I ought to be able to carry one pail of milk, seeing that I've done as much or more every day since I was Gladys's age."

"But that's no reason why I shouldn't help along a little to make up for your not bein' mad 'cause Snip an' me slept in the barn. Besides, I'd like to

say to the fellers that I'd carried as much milk as a whole pail full once in my life—that is, if I ever see 'em again," he added with a sigh.

"Then you came from the city?"

"Yes, an' I never got so far out in the country before. Say, it's mighty fine, ain't it?" And as Aunt Hannah relinquished her hold on the pail, Seth started toward the house without waiting for a reply to his question.

After placing the stool bottom up by the side of the broad stone which served as doorstep, the little woman called to Gladys:

"It's time White-Face was taken to pasture, child."

"Do you mean the cow?" Seth asked.

"Yes, dear."

"Why can't I take her to the pasture; that is, if you'll tell me where to find it?"

"Unfasten her chain, and she will show you the way. It's only across the road over yonder."

Seth ran quickly to the barn, and having arrived at the doorway through which Aunt Hannah disappeared when she went about the task of milking, he halted in surprise and fear, looking at what seemed to him an enormous beast with long, threatening

horns, which she shook now and then in what appeared to be a most vicious fashion.

Only once before had Seth ever seen an animal of this species, and then it was when he and Pip Smith had travelled over to the Erie Yards to see a drove of oxen taken from the cars to the abattoir.

It surely seemed very dangerous to turn loose such a huge beast; but Seth was determined to perform whatsoever labor lay in his power, with the idea that he might not be called upon to pay quite as much for breakfast, and, summing up all his courage, he advanced toward the cow.

She shook her head restively, impatient for the breakfast of sweet grass, and he leaped back suddenly, frightened as badly of her as Aunt Hannah had been of Snip.

Once more he made an attempt, and once more leaped back in alarm, this time to be greeted with a peal of merry laughter, and a volley of shrill barks from Snip, who probably fancied Seth stood in need of his protection.

"Why did you jump so?" Gladys asked merrily.

Seth's face reddened, and he stammered not a little in reply:

"I reckon that cow would make it kind'er lively for strangers, wouldn't he?"

"And you are really afraid of poor old White-Face? Why, she's as gentle as Snippey, though of course you couldn't pet her so much."

Then Gladys stepped boldly forward, and Snip whined and barked in a perfect spasm of fear at being carried so near the formidable-looking animal.

"Now, you are just as foolish as your master," Gladys said with a hearty laugh; but she allowed the dog to slip down from her arms, and as he sought safety behind his master, she unloosened the chain from the cow's neck, leading her by the horn out of the barn.

Then it was that Snip plucked up courage to join the girl who had been so kind to him, and Seth, thoroughly ashamed at having betrayed so much cowardice, followed his example.

"I want to do something toward paying for my breakfast," he said hesitatingly; "but I never saw a cow before, and that one acted as if he was up to mischief. I s'pose they're a good deal like dogs—all right after a feller gets acquainted with 'em."

"Some cows are ugly, I suppose," Gladys replied reflectively, taking Snip once more in her arms as

the little fellow hung back in alarm when White-Face stopped to gather a tempting bunch of clover; "but Aunt Hannah has had this one ever since she was a calf, and we two are great friends. She's a real well-behaved cow, an' never makes any trouble about going into pasture. There, she's in now, and all we've got to do is to put up the bars. By the time we get back breakfast will be ready. Did you walk all the way from the city?"

There was no necessity for Seth to make a reply, because at this instant an audacious wren flew past within a dozen inches of Snip's nose, causing him to spring from the girl's arms in a vain pursuit, which was not ended until the children were at the kitchen door.

The morning meal was prepared, and as Gladys drew out a chair to show Seth where he should sit, Aunt Hannah asked anxiously:

"What does the dog do while you are eating?"

"You'll see how well he can behave himself," Snip's master replied proudly, as the little fellow laid down on the floor at a respectful distance from the table.

Much to Seth's surprise, instead of immediately beginning the meal, the little woman bowed her

head reverentially, Gladys following the example, and for the first time in his life did the boy hear a blessing invoked upon the food of which he was about to partake.

It caused him just a shade of uneasiness and perhaps awe, this "prayin' before breakfast" as he afterward expressed it while going over the events of the day with Snip, and he did not feel wholly at ease until the meal had well nigh come to an end.

Then the little woman gave free rein to her curiosity, by asking:

"Where are you going, my boy?"

"That's what I don't just know," Seth replied, after a short pause. "Pip Smith, he said the country was a terrible nice place to live in, an' when Snip an' I had to come away, I thought perhaps we could find a chance to earn some money."

"Haven't you any parents, or a home?" Aunt Hannah asked in surprise.

"I don't s'pose I have. I did live over to Mr. Genet's in Jersey City; but he died, an' I had to hustle for myself."

"Had to what?" Aunt Hannah asked.

"Why, shinny 'round for money enough to pay my way. There ain't much of anything a feller

like me can do but sell papers, an' I don't cut any big ice at that, 'cause I can't get 'round as fast as the other boys."

"Did you earn enough to provide you with food, and clothes, an' a place to sleep?"

"Well, sometimes. You see I ain't flashin' up very strong on clothes, an' Snip an' I had a room down to Mother Hyde's that cost us eighty cents a week. We could most always get along, except sometimes when there was a heavy storm an' trade turned bad."

"I suppose you became discouraged with that way of living?" the little woman said reflectively.

"Well, it ain't so awful swell; but then you can't call it so terrible bad. Perhaps some time I could have got money enough to start a news-stand, an' then I'd been all right, you know."

"Why did you come into the country?"

"You see we had to leave mighty sudden, 'cause——"

Seth checked himself; he had been very near to explaining exactly why he left New York so unceremoniously. Perhaps but for the "prayers before breakfast" he might have told this kindly faced little woman all his troubles; now, however, he did

not care to do so, believing she would consider he had committed a great crime in passing a lead nickel, even though unwittingly.

Neither was he willing to tell so good a woman an absolute untruth, and therefore held his peace; but the flush which had come into his cheeks was ample proof to his hostess that in his life was something which caused shame.

Aunt Hannah looked at him for an instant, and then as if realizing that the scrutiny might cause him uneasiness, turned her eyes away as she asked in a low tone:

"Do you believe it would be possible for you to find such work in the country as would support you and the dog?"

"I don't know anything about it, 'cause you see I never was in the country before," Seth replied, decidedly relieved by this change in the subject of conversation. "Pip Smith thought there was milk an' pies layin' 'round to be picked up by anybody, an' accordin' to his talk it seemed as if a feller might squeak along somehow. If I could always have such a bed as I got last night, the rest of it wouldn't trouble a great deal."

"But you slept in the barn!" Gladys cried.

"Yes; it was nicer than any room Mother Hyde's got. Don't boys like me do something to earn money out this way?"

"The farmers' sons find employment enough 'round home; but I don't think you would be able to earn very much, my boy."

"I might strike something," Seth said reflectively. "At any rate, Snip an' I'll have to keep movin'."

"Then you have no idea where you're going?" And Aunt Hannah appeared to be distressed in mind.

"I wish I did," Seth replied with a sigh, and Gladys said quickly:

"You can't keep walkin' 'round all the time, for what will you do when it rains?"

"Perhaps I might come across a barn, same's I did last night."

"And grow to be a regular tramp?"

"I wouldn't be one if I was willin' to work, would I? That's all Snip an' me ask for now, is just a chance to earn what we'll eat, an' a place to sleep."

Aunt Hannah rose from the table quickly in apparently a preoccupied manner, and the conversation was thus brought to an abrupt close.

Snip, who had already breakfasted most generously, scrambled to his feet for another excursion into the wonderful fields where he might chase butterflies to his heart's content, and Seth lingered by the open doorway undecided as to what he should say or do.

Gladys began removing the dishes from the table, Aunt Hannah assisting now and then listlessly, as if her mind was far away; and after two or three vain efforts Seth managed to ask:

"How much will I have to pay for breakfast an' sleepin' in the barn?"

"Why, bless your heart, my boy, I wouldn't think of chargin' anything for that," the little woman said, almost sharply.

"But we must pay our way, you know, though I ain't got such a dreadful pile of money. I don't want folks to think we're regular tramps."

"You needn't fear anything of that kind yet a while, but if it would make you feel more comfortable in mind to do something toward payin' for the food which has been freely given, you may try your hand at 'clearin' up the barn. Gladys an' I aim to keep it cleanly; but even at the best it doesn't look as I would like to see it."

Seth sat about this task with alacrity, although not knowing exactly what ought to be done; but the boy who is willing to work and eager to please will generally succeed in his efforts, even though he be ignorant as to the proper method.

It was while working at that end of the barn nearest the house at a time when Aunt Hannah and Gladys were standing at the open window washing the breakfast dishes, that he overheard, without absolutely intending to do so, a certain conversation not meant for his ears.

It is true he had no right to listen, and also true that the hum of voices came to his ears several moments before he paid any attention whatsoever, or made an effort to distinguish the words.

Then that which he heard literally forced him to listen for more.

It was Aunt Hannah who said, evidently in reply to a suggestion from Gladys:

"It is a pity and a shame to see a child like that poor little lame boy wandering about the country trying to find work, when he isn't fitted for anything of the kind. But how could we give him a home here, my dear?"

"I am sure it wouldn't cost you anything, Aunt

Hannah. With three spare rooms in the house and hardly ever a visitor to use one of them, why couldn't he have a bed here?"

"He can, my dear, and it's my duty to give him a home, as I see plainly; but you can't imagine what a cross it will be for me to have a boy and a dog around the old place. I have lived here alone so many years, except after you came, that a new face, even though it be a friendly one, disturbs me."

"Surely you'd get used to him in a few days, and he's a boy who tries to do all he can in the way of helping."

"I believe so, my dear, and, therefore, because it seems to be my duty, I'm goin' to ask him to stay, at least until he can find a better home; but at the same time I hold that it will be a dreadful cross for me to bear."

Seth suddenly became aware that he was playing the part of a sneak by thus listening; and although eager to hear more, turned quickly away, busying himself at the opposite side of the barn, where it would not be possible to play the eavesdropper in even so slight a degree.

Until now it had never come into his mind that this little woman, whose home was so exceedingly

inviting, might give him an opportunity to remain, even for the space of twenty-four hours; but as it was thus suggested, he realized how happy both he and Snip would be in such a place, and believed he could ask for nothing more in this world if it should be his good fortune to have an opportunity to stay.

There was little probability the officers of the law would find him here, however rigorously the search might be continued, and it seemed as if every day spent in such a household must be filled with unalloyed pleasure.

He stopped suddenly in his work as the thought came that it had already been decided he should have an invitation to remain, and a great joy came into his heart just for an instant, after which he forced it back resolutely, saying to himself:

"A feller who would bother a good woman like Aunt Hannah deserves to be kicked. She's made up her mind to give me a chance jest 'cause she thinks it's something that ought'er be done; but I ain't goin' to play mean with her. It's lucky I happened to hear what was said, else I'd have jumped at the chance of stayin' when she told me I might."

At that moment Snip came into the barn eager to

be petted by his master, and wearied with the fruitless chase after foolish and annoying birds.

"It's tough on you, little man, 'cause a home like this is jest what you've been achin' for, an' they'd be awful good to you," Seth whispered as he took the dog in his arms. "How would it be if I should sneak off an' leave you with 'em? I ought'er do it, Snippey dear; but it would most break my heart to give up the only family I've got. An' that's where I'm mighty mean! You'd have a great time here, an' by stickin' to me there ain't much show for fun, unless things take a terribly sudden turn."

Snip licked his master's chin by way of reply, and Seth pressed the little fellow yet more closely, saying with what was very like a sob:

"I can't do it, little man, I can't do it! You must stick to me, else I'll be the lonesomest feller in all the world. We'll hold on here a spell, an' then hustle once more. It must be we'll find somebody who'll give us work, providin' the detectives don't nab me."

Then he turned his attention once more to the task set him by Aunt Hannah, and Snip sat on the threshold of the door watching his master and snap-

ping at the impudent sparrows, until Gladys came out with an invitation for the dog to escort her to a neighbor's house, where she was forced to go with a message.

"I'll take good care of him," she called to Seth, as Snip ran on joyously in advance, "and bring him back before you finish sweeping the barn."

"I'm not afraid of his comin' to any harm while you keep an eye on him; but I believe he's beginnin' to like you almost better'n he does me," Seth replied, with a shade of sorrow in his tone, whereat Gladys laughed merrily.

Then the boy continued his work with a will, and ample evidence of his labor was apparent when Aunt Hannah came out, looking very much like the fairy godmothers of "once upon a time" stories, despite the wrinkles on her placid face.

"It looks very neat," she said approvingly. "I never would have believed a boy could be so handy with a broom! Last spring I hired William Dean, the son of a neighbor, to tidy up the barn and the yard; but it looked worse when he had finished than before."

"Have I earned the breakfast Snip and I ate?" Seth asked, pleased with her praise.

"Indeed you have, child, although there was no reason for doing anything of the kind. When we share with those who are less fortunate, we are doing no more than our duty, an' I don't like to think that you feel it necessary to pay for a mouthful of food."

"It was the very nicest breakfast I ever had, Miss —Miss——"

"You may call me 'Aunt Hannah,' for I'm an aunt to all the children in the neighborhood, accordin' to their way of thinking. Would you be contented to stay here for a while, my dear?"

"Indeed I would!" was the emphatic reply, and then Seth added, remembering the conversation he had overheard: "That is, I would if I could; but Snip an' me have got to hunt for a chance to earn our livin', an' it won't do to think of loafin' here, even though it is such a fine place."

Aunt Hannah smiled kindly and said, with a certain show of determination, as if forcing herself to an unwelcome decision:

"You an' the little dog shall stay for a while, my boy, and perhaps you can find some kind of work nearabout; but if not, surely it won't increase my cost of living, for we'll have a garden, which is what

I'm not able to attend to now I've grown so old. Why did you leave the city, my child?"

Had it not been for that "praying before breakfast" Seth would have invented some excuse for his flight; but now he could not bring himself, as he gazed into the kindly eyes, either to utter a deliberate falsehood or to make an equivocal reply.

"I'd like to tell you," he said hesitatingly, after a long pause, during which Aunt Hannah looked out across the meadow rather than at him. "I'd like to tell you, but I can't," he repeated.

"I don't believe you are a bad boy, Seth," she said mildly, but without glancing toward him.

The lad remained silent with downcast eyes, and when it seemed to him as if many minutes had passed, the little woman added:

"Perhaps you will tell me after we are better acquainted. Gladys declares, an' I've come quite to her way of thinking, that you should remain with us for a time. I don't believe you could find work such as would pay for your board and lodging, unless it was with an old woman like me, and so we're to consider you and Snip as members of the family."

Seth shook his head, feebly at first, for the temptation to accept the invitation was very great, and

then decidedly, as if the decision he had arrived at could not be changed.

"Would you rather go away?" Aunt Hannah asked in surprise.

"No, I wouldn't!" Seth cried passionately, the tears coming dangerously near his eyelids. "I'd do anything in this world for the sake of havin' such a home as this; but all the same, Snip an' I can't stay to bother you. We'll leave when he comes back."

"Listen to me, my child," and now the little woman spoke with a degree of firmness which sounded strangely from one so mild, "you are not to go away this day, no matter what may be done later. We will talk about my plan after dinner, and then perhaps you'll feel like explaining why you think it necessary to go further in search of work after I have given you a chance to earn what you and the dog may need."

Then Gladys' voice was heard in the distance as she urged Snip on in his pursuit of a butterfly, and Aunt Hannah went quickly into the dwelling, leaving Seth gazing after her wistfully as he muttered:

"I never believed there was such a good woman in this world!"

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE FLIGHT.

NEITHER Gladys nor Snip came into the barn immediately after their return, probably because the former had some report to make as to the message with which she had been entrusted, and Seth was left alone to turn over in his mind all that Aunt Hannah had said.

A very disagreeable half hour he spent in the conflict between what he believed to be his duty and his inclination.

It seemed that all his troubles would be at an end if he might remain in that peaceful place, as the little woman had suggested, and he knew full well that he could never hope to find as pleasant an abiding place.

As the matter presented itself to his mind, he was not at liberty to accept the generous invitation unless the story of why he left New York was first told; and once Aunt Hannah was aware that he had transgressed the law by passing counterfeit money,

it seemed certain she would look upon him as a sinner too great for pardon.

He believed it was better to go without explanations than be utterly cast off by the little woman whom he was rapidly beginning to love, and, in addition, forfeit her friendship forever. So long as she could only guess at the reasons for his flight, she might think of him kindly, and, perhaps, in time, he would be able to prove that he was worthy of confidence.

"I'll come back when I'm a man, an' then she'll have to believe I didn't mean to do anything so terrible bad when I passed the lead nickel," he said to himself, in an effort to strengthen the resolution just made. "It would be mighty nice to live here, an' what a good time Snip could have!"

Then he tried to convince himself that his pet should be left behind; but the thought of going away from that charming home—which might have been his but for the carelessness in handling the counterfeit money—leaving behind the only friend he had known for many a long day, brought the tears to his eyes again.

"I'll have to take the poor little man with me, an' it'll come mighty rough on him!" he said with

a sob. "I reckon he thinks this kind of fun, when he can chase butterflies an' birds to his heart's content, is goin' to last, an' he'll be dreadfully disappointed after we leave; but I couldn't get along without him!"

Gladys interrupted his mournful train of thought, and perhaps it was well, for the boy was rapidly working himself into a most melancholy frame of mind.

She and Snip came tearing into the barn as if there was no other aim in this life than enjoyment, and so startled the sorrowing Seth that he arose to his feet in something very nearly resembling alarm.

"If you jump like that I shall begin to think you are as nervous as Aunt Hannah," she cried with a merry laugh. "She insists that between Snip and me there will no longer be any peace for her, unless we sober down very suddenly; but do you know, Seth, that I've lived here with no other companion than the dear old woman so long, it seems as if some good fairy had sent this little fluff of white to make me happy. I had rather have him for a friend than all the children in the neighborhood, which isn't saying very much, in view of the fact that the two Dean boys and Malvinia Stubbs are the only people

of nearabout my age in this section of the country."

"I believe Snip thinks as much of you as you do of him," Seth replied gloomily. "I never knew him to make friends with any one before; but perhaps that was because he saw only the fellers who liked to tease him. If I wasn't mighty mean, he'd stay here all the time."

"Of course he'll stay," Gladys cried as she tossed the tiny dog in the air while he gave vent to an imitation growl. "Aunt Hannah and I have arranged it without so much as asking your permission. You two are to live here; Snip's work is to enjoy himself with me, while you're to make a garden, the like of which won't be seen this side of New York. What do you think of settling down to being a farmer?"

"I'd like it mighty well, but it can't be done." And Seth gazed out through the open door, not daring to meet Miss Gladys' startled gaze.

"Wait till you've talked with Aunt Hannah," she exclaimed after the first burst of surprise had passed. "We've fixed everything, an' you'll find that there isn't a word for you to say."

"I have talked with her," Seth replied gloomily. "We'd both love to stay mighty well, but we can't."

"I'd like to know why"; and now Gladys was on her feet, looking sternly at the sorrowful guest. "Neither you nor Snip have got a home, an' here's one with the best woman who ever lived—that much I know to a certainty."

"I believe you, but it can't be done." And the boy walked to the other side of the barn as if to end the conversation.

Gladys looked after him for a moment in mingled surprise and petulance, and then, taking Snip in her arms, she walked straight into the house, leaving him seemingly more alone than ever.

During the remainder of the forenoon neither Aunt Hannah, Gladys, nor Snip came out of the door, and then the little woman summoned him to dinner.

Seth entered the house much as a miserable culprit might have done, and, after making a toilet at the kitchen sink, sat down at the table in obedience to Aunt Hannah's instructions.

This time he half expected she would pray, and was not mistaken. Not having been taken by surprise, he heard every word, and his cheeks crimsoned with mingled shame and pleasure as she asked her Heavenly Father to bless and guide the home-

less stranger who had come to them, inclining his heart to the right path.

Aunt Hannah did not use many words in asking the blessing; but to Seth each one was full of a meaning which could not be mistaken, and he knew she was pleading that he might be willing to confess his sins.

Perhaps if the good woman had asked at the conclusion of the prayer why he left New York, Seth would have told her everything; but no word was spoken on the subject, and by the time dinner had come to an end he was more firmly convinced than ever that she could not forgive him for having passed the counterfeit money.

Nothing was said regarding his departure or the proposition that he should become a member of the household; but Gladys gave the outlines of a journey she proposed making with Snip that afternoon, and the heavy-hearted boy understood that it was not her purpose to return until nightfall.

Then Aunt Hannah asked if he felt equal to the task of spading up a small piece of ground behind the barn, where she counted on making a garden, and he could do no less than agree to undertake the task.

Therefore did it seem to him as if he was in duty bound to remain at the farm during the remainder of that day at least; but there was in his mind the fact that he must continue his aimless journey that very night, or be willing to give a detailed account of his wrongdoing.

Immediately after the meal had been brought to a close Seth went out with the little woman to begin the work of making ready for a garden.

When she had explained what was necessary to be done he labored at the task with feverish energy, for it seemed to him as if the task must be concluded before he would be at liberty to leave the farm, and go he must, because each moment was it becoming more nearly impossible to bring himself to confess why he and Snip were fugitives.

Some of the neighbors called upon Aunt Hannah that afternoon, therefore she was forced to leave him alone after having described what must be done in order to make a garden of the unpromising looking land behind the barn; and he knew that Gladys and Snip would not return until time for supper, because the girl had plainly given him to understand as much during the conversation at the dinner-table.

His hands were blistered, and his back ached be-

cause of the unaccustomed labor; but the work was completed to the best of his ability before sunset, and then Aunt Hannah found time to inspect the result of his toil.

"I declare you have done as well as any man I could have hired, an' a good deal better than some!" she exclaimed, and a flush of joy overspread Seth's face as he arose with difficulty from the grass where he had thrown himself for a much-needed rest. "William Dean tried to do the same thing, but when he had finished the ground looked as if it had no more than been teased with a comb. You have turned it up till it is the same as ploughed, an' we'll have a famous garden, even though it is a bit late in the season."

"I'm glad you like it," the boy replied. "Of course I could do such work quicker after I'd tried my hand at it two or three times."

"I didn't expect you'd more than half finish it in one day, an' now there's nothing to be done but put in the seeds. We'll see to that in the morning. I must go after White-Face now, or we shall have a late supper. Have you seen anything of Gladys?"

"She hasn't been here. Say, why can't I get the cow?"

"I suppose you might, for she's gentle as a kitten; but you must be tired."

"I reckon it won't hurt me to walk from here to the pasture." And Seth started off at full speed, delighted with the opportunity to perform yet more work, for there was in his mind the thought that Aunt Hannah would think kindly of him after he was gone, if he showed himself willing to do whatsoever came in his way.

It did not seem exactly safe to walk deliberately up to that enormous beast of a cow; but since Gladys had done so he advanced without any great show of fear, and was surprised at discovering that she willingly obeyed the pressure on her horns.

He led her into the cleanly barn, threw some hay into the manger, and then fastened the chain around her neck, all the while wondering at his own bravery.

"Is there anything more for me to do?" he asked, as Aunt Hannah came out of the house with the three-legged stool and the glistening tin pail.

"You've earned a rest, my dear," the little woman said cheerily. "Sit down on the front porch and enjoy the sensation which comes to every one who has done a good day's work. We poor people can

have what rich folks can't, or don't, which amounts to much the same thing."

Seth did not avail himself of this permission; but stood on the threshold of the "tie-up" watching the little woman force out the big streams of milk without apparent effort, until the desire to successfully perform the same task was strong upon him.

"Don't you think I could do that?" he asked timidly.

"I dare say you might, my child; there isn't much of a knack to it."

"Would you be willin' to let me try?"

"Of course you shall," and Aunt Hannah got up quickly from the stool. "Be gentle, and you'll have no trouble."

Seth failed at first; but after a few trials he was able to extract a thin stream of the foaming fluid, although White-Face did not appear well pleased with his experiments.

Then Aunt Hannah took the matter in hand, and when she had finished Seth carried the pail for her, arriving at the kitchen just as Gladys and Snip entered, both seemingly weary with their afternoon's frolic.

Bread, baked that forenoon, and warm milk, made

up the evening meal, and again Aunt Hannah prayed for the stranger, much to his secret satisfaction.

While they were at the table the little woman said, in a low tone of authority, such as did not seem suited to her lips:

"You are to stay here until morning, Seth, and then we will have another talk. I'm an old-fashioned old maid, an' believe in early to bed an' early to rise, therefore we don't light lamp or candle in the summer-time, unless some of the neighbors loiter later than usual. You are to sleep in the room over the kitchen, my boy, and when we have finished supper I guess you'll be glad to lie down, for spading up a piece of grass land isn't easy work."

Understanding from these remarks that he was expected to retire without delay, Seth took Snip in his arms immediately the meal had come to a close, and said, as he stood waiting to be shown the way to his room:

"You've been mighty good to us, Miss—Aunt Hannah, an' I hope we'll have a chance to pay you back some day."

"You've done that this afternoon," Gladys cried laughingly. "Aunt Hannah has wanted that gar-

den spot spaded ever since the snow went away, and the boys around here were too lazy to do it. All hands, including Snip, will have a share in the planting, and I wouldn't be surprised if we beat our neighbors, even though it is late for such work."

Seth would have liked to take leave of these two who had been so kind to him, for he was still determined to leave the house secretly as soon as was possible; but he did not dare say all that was in his mind lest his purpose be betrayed, and followed Aunt Hannah as she led the way to the room above the kitchen.

"You won't forget to say your prayers," she said, kissing him good-night, an act which brought the tears to his eyes; and Seth shook his head by way of promise, although never did he remember having done such a thing.

After undressing, and when Snip had been provided with a comfortable bed in the cushioned rocking-chair, Seth attempted to do as he had promised, and found it an exceedingly difficult task. There was in his heart both thanksgiving and sorrow, but he could not give words to either, and after several vain efforts he said reverentially:

"I hope Aunt Hannah will have just as snifty a

time in this world as she deserves, for she's a dandy, if there ever was one!"

Then he crept between the lavender-scented sheets and gave himself up to the pleasure of gazing at his surroundings.

Never before had he seen such a room, so comfort-inviting and cleanly! There were two regular pillows on the bed, and each of them enclosed in a snowy white case which was most pleasing to the cheek, while the fragrant sheets seemed much too fine to be slept on.

Snip was quite as well satisfied with the surroundings as his master. The chair cushion was particularly soft, and he curled himself into a little ring with a sigh of content which told that if the question of leaving the Morse farm might be decided by him, he and his master would remain there all their lives.

Weary, as Seth was, he found it exceedingly difficult to prevent his eyes from closing in slumber; yet sleep was a luxury he could not indulge in at that time, lest he should not awaken at an hour when he might leave the dwelling without arousing the other inmates.

Perhaps it would have been wiser had he not un-

dressed himself; but the temptation of getting into such a bed as Aunt Hannah had provided for his benefit was greater than he could withstand, therefore must he be exceedingly careful not to venture even upon the border of dreamland.

It is needless to make any attempt at trying to describe Seth's condition of mind, for it may readily be understood that his grief was great. More than once did he say to himself it would be better to tell Aunt Hannah all; but each time he understood, or believed he did, that by such a course he should not only be cutting himself off from all possibility of remaining longer at the farm, but would be forfeiting her friendship.

To his mind he would be forced to leave the farm if he told the story, and he could not remain without doing so; therefore it seemed wisest to run away, thus avoiding a most painful scene.

Then came the time when his eyelids rebelled against remaining open; and in order to save himself from falling asleep it seemed necessary to get out of bed.

Crouching by the window, after having dressed himself, he gazed out over the broad fields that were bathed by the moonlight, and pictured to himself the

pleasure of viewing them night after night with the knowledge that they formed a portion of his home. And then, such a revery being almost painful, he nerved himself for what was to be done by taking Snip in his arms. The dog was sleeping soundly, and Seth whispered in a voice which was far from being steady:

"It's too bad, old man; but we can't help ourselves. You'll be sorry not to see Gladys when you wake; but you won't feel half so bad as I shall, 'cause I know what a slim chance there is of our ever strikin' another place like this."

Then he opened the door softly, still holding Snip in his arms.

Not a sound could be heard; he crept to the head of the stairs and listened intently.

It was as if he and Snip were the only occupants of the house. Seth had no very clear idea as to how long he had been in the chamber; but it seemed as if at least two hours had passed since Aunt Hannah bade him good-night, and there was no reason why he should not begin the flight at once.

With his hand on Snip's head as a means of preventing the dog from growling in case any unusual sound was heard, Seth began the descent of the

stairs, creeping from one to the other with the utmost caution, while the boards creaked and groaned under his weight until it seemed certain both Aunt Hannah and Gladys must be aroused.

In trying to move yet more cautiously he staggered against the stair-rail, squeezing Snip until the little fellow yelped sharply; and Seth stood breathlessly awaiting some token that the mistress of the house had been alarmed.

He was surprised because of hearing nothing; it appeared strange that any one could sleep while he was making such a noise, and yet the silence was as profound as before he began to descend.

Never had he believed a flight of stairs could be so long, and when it seemed as if he should be at the bottom, he had hardly gotten more than halfway down.

The descent came to an end, however, as must all things in this world, and he groped his way toward the kitchen door, not so much as daring to breathe.

Once he fancied it was possible to distinguish a slight, rustling sound; but when he stopped all was silent as before, therefore the fugitive went on until his hand was on the kitchen door.

The key was turned noiselessly in the lock; he

raised the latch, and the door swung open with never a creak.

The moonlight flooded that portion of the kitchen where he stood irresolute, as if even now believing it might be better to confess why he had been forced to come away from New York; and as he turned his head ever so slightly to listen, a sudden fear came upon him.

He saw, not more than half a dozen paces distant, a human form advancing. A cry of fear burst from his lips, and he would have leaped out of the open door but that a gentle pressure on his shoulder restrained him.

"Where are you going, my child?" a kindly voice asked; and he knew that what he had mistaken for an apparition was none other than Aunt Hannah.

Seth could not speak; his mouth had suddenly become parched, and his knees trembled beneath him. He had been discovered while seemingly prowling around the house like a thief, and on the instant he realized in what way his actions might be misconstrued.

"Where are you going, Seth dear?"

"I wasn't— I had to run away, Aunt Hannah,

an' that's the truth of it!" he cried passionately, suddenly recovering the use of his tongue.

"Why didn't you tell me at supper-time?"

"I was afraid you and Gladys would try to stop me, an' perhaps I couldn't stick to what I'd agreed on."

"Do you really want to leave us, Seth?"

"Indeed I don't, Aunt Hannah! I'd give anything in this world if I could stay, for this is the very nicest place I ever was in. Oh, indeed, I don't want to go away!"

"Then why not stay?"

"I can't! I can't, 'cause I'd have to tell——"

Seth did not finish the sentence, but buried his face in Snip's silky hair.

"Is it because you can't tell me why you left the city?" And the little woman laid her hand on the boy's shoulder with a motion not unlike a caress.

Seth nodded, but did not trust himself to speak.

"Then go right back to bed. You shall stay here, my dear, until the time comes when you can confide in me, and meanwhile I will not believe you have been guilty of any wickedness."

## CHAPTER V.

### AN ACCIDENT.

FILLED with shame and confusion, Seth made no resistance when Aunt Hannah ordered him back to bed; but obeyed silently, moving stealthily as when he began the flight. He was trembling as with a sudden chill when he undressed and laid himself down, while Snip lost no time in curling his tiny body into a good imitation of a ball, wondering, perhaps, why he had thus been needlessly disturbed in his "beauty sleep."

Seth was no longer capable of speculating upon the problem in which he had been involved through a lead nickel and an advertisement in the newspapers. He could only realize that Aunt Hannah had good reason to believe him a thief, or worse, otherwise she would not have been waiting to discover if he attempted to prowl around the house while she was supposed to be asleep, and his cheeks burned with shame at the thought.

He wished that the night might never come to an

end, and then he would not be forced to meet her face to face, as he must when the sun rose.

"Of course she'll tell Gladys where she found me, an' both of 'em will believe I'm the worst feller that ever lived!" he whispered to himself; and then tears, bitter and scalding, flowed down his cheeks, moistening the spotless linen, but bringing some slight degree of comfort, because sleep quickly followed in their train.

Seth was awakened next morning by Aunt Hannah's voice, as she called gently:

"It's time to get up, my dear. The sun is out looking for boys an' dogs, an' you mustn't disappoint him."

Snip ran eagerly down the stairs as if to greet some one for whom he had a great affection, and Seth heard the little woman say to him:

"I really believe Gladys was in the right when she said I would come to like you almost as much as if you were a cat. Do you want a saucer of milk?"

"She won't talk so pleasantly when I get there," Seth said to himself. "I'd rather take a sound flogging than have her look at me as if I was a thief!"

The lad soon came to know Aunt Hannah better

than to accuse her of being cruel even in the slightest degree.

When he entered the kitchen she greeted him with a kindly smile, and said, much as if the events of the previous night were no more than a disagreeable dream:

"You see I'm beginning to depend on you already, Seth. Gladys isn't up yet, and I've left White-Face in the barn thinkin' you'd take her to the pasture. The grass is wet with dew, an' I'm gettin' so old that I don't dare take the chances of wetting my feet."

Seth did not wait to make his toilet, but ran swiftly to the barn, rejoicing because of the opportunity to perform some task.

When the cow had been cared for he loitered around outside, picking up a stick here and a stone there as if it was of the highest importance that the lawn in front of the house be freed from litter of every kind before breakfast.

His one desire was to avoid coming face to face with Aunt Hannah until it should be absolutely necessary, and while he was thus inventing work Gladys came out in search of Snip.

Seth understood at once that the girl was yet

ignorant of his attempt to run away, and his heart swelled with gratitude toward the little woman who had thus far kept secret what he would have been ashamed to tell.

Just then Snip was of far more importance in the eyes of Aunt Hannah's niece than was his master, and after a hasty "good-morning" she ran away with the dog at her heels for the accustomed exercise before breakfast.

"Come in an' wash your face, my dear. Breakfast will be cooked by the time you are ready to eat it, and such work as you are doing may as well be left until a more convenient season."

Seth felt forced to obey this summons promptly; but he did not dare meet the little woman's glance. Had he observed her closely, however, it would have been seen that she studiously avoided looking toward him. Aunt Hannah was averse to causing pain, even to the brutes which came in her way, and at this particular time she understood very much of what was in the boy's mind.

Seth feared lest in the "prayer before breakfast" some reference might be made to what he had attempted to do during the night; but his fears were groundless. The little woman asked that her Fa-

ther's blessing might fall upon the homeless; but the words were spoken in the same fervent, kindly tone as on the evening previous, and again the boy thanked her in his heart.

When the morning meal had come to an end Gladys was eager Seth should join her and Snip on an excursion through the grove where squirrels were said to be "thick as peas," and under almost any other circumstances the guest would have been delighted to accept the invitation; but now he insisted that there was very much work to be done before nightfall, which would force him to remain near the house.

"We've only to plant the garden," Aunt Hannah interrupted, "an' then there's no reason why you shouldn't enjoy a stroll among the trees."

Seth remained silent, but determined to do all in his power to atone for what seemed to him very nearly a crime, and Gladys decided that she must also take part in the sowing of the seeds.

Until noon the three, with Snip as a most interested spectator, worked industriously, and then, as Aunt Hannah said, "there was nothing to be done save wait patiently until the sun and the rain had performed their portion of the task."

Seth did not join Gladys and Snip in their afternoon romp, but continued at his self-imposed tasks until night had come, doing quite as much work with his mind as his hands. Twenty times over he resolved to tell the little woman exactly why he was forced to run away from New York, and as often decided he could not confess himself such a criminal as it seemed certain, because of the advertisement, he really was.

"I couldn't stand it to have her look at me after she knew everything," he repeated again and again.

There was no idea in his mind as to how the matter might end, save when now and then he had the faintest of faint hopes that perhaps she might forget, or learn the truth from some one other than himself.

During three days he struggled between what he knew to be duty and his own inclination, and in all that time the little woman never showed by word or look that there was any disagreeable secret between them.

Seth tried to ease his conscience by working most industriously during every moment of daylight, and then came the time when it was absolutely impossible to find anything more for his hands to do. He

had swept the barn floor until it was as clean as a broom could make it; the wood in the shed had been piled methodically; a goodly supply of kindlings were prepared, and not so much as a pebble was to be seen on the velvety lawn.

Gladys had tried in vain to entice him away from what she declared was useless labor, and Snip did all within the power of a dog to coax his master into joining him in the jolly strolls among the trees or across the green fields, and yet Seth remained near-about the little house in a feverish search for something with which to employ his hands.

"It's no use, Snippey dear," he said on the fourth night of his stay at the farm, after the family had retired, "I can't stay an' not tell Aunt Hannah, an' it's certain we won't be allowed to stop more'n a minute after she knows the truth. If I could talk to her in the dark, when I couldn't see her face, it wouldn't seem quite so bad; but we go to bed so early there's no chance for that. We must have it out mighty soon, for I can't hang 'round here many hours longer without tellin' all about ourselves."

He was not ready for bed, although an hour had passed since he bade Aunt Hannah and Gladys good-night.

The moon had gilded the rail fence, the shed, and the barn until they were transformed into fairy handiwork; the road gleamed like gold with an enamel of black marking the position of trees and bushes, and Seth had gazed upon the wondrous picture without really being aware of time's flight.

Having repeated to Snip that which was in his mind, the boy was on the point of making himself ready for a visit from the dream elves when he heard, apparently from the room below, what sounded like a fall, a smothered exclamation, and the splintering of glass.

Only for a single instant did he stand motionless, and then, realizing that some accident must have happened, he ran downstairs, Snip following close behind, barking shrilly.

Once in the kitchen an exclamation of terror burst from his lips.

The room was illumined by a line of fire, seemingly extending entirely across the floor, which was fringed by a dense smoke that rose nearly to the ceiling, and, beside the table, where she had evidently fallen, lay Aunt Hannah, struggling to smother with bare hands the yellow, dancing flames that had fastened upon her clothing.

It needed not the fragments of glass and brass to tell Seth that the little woman had accidentally fallen, breaking the lamp she carried, and that the fire was fed by oil.

Like a flash there came into his mind the memory of that night when Dud Wilson overturned a lamp on the floor of his news-stand, and he had heard it said then that the property might have been saved if the boys had smothered the flames with their coats, or any fabric of woollen, instead of trying to drown it out with water.

He pulled off his coat in a twinkling, threw it over the prostrate woman, and added to the covering rag rugs from the floor, pressing them down firmly as he said, in a trembling voice, much as though speaking to a child:

"Don't get scared! We can't put the fire out with water; but I'll soon smother it."

"You needn't bother about me, my child; but attend to the house! It would be dreadful if we should lose the dear old home!"

"I'll get the best of this business in a jiffy; but it won't do to give you a chance of bein' burned."

"There is no fire here now." And Aunt Hannah

threw back the rugs, despite Seth's hold upon them, to show that the flames were really quenched. "For mercy's sake, save the house! It's the only home I ever knew, an' my heart would be wellnigh broken if I lost it!"

Before she had ceased speaking Seth was flinging rug after rug on the burning oil, for Aunt Hannah, like many another woman living in the country, had an ample supply of such floor coverings.

Not until he had entirely covered that line of flame, and had danced to and fro over the rugs to stamp out the last spark of fire, did he venture to open the outside door, and it was high time, for the pungent smoke filled the kitchen until it was exceedingly difficult to breathe.

The little woman remained upon the floor where Seth had first found her, and it was only after the night breeze was blowing through the room, carrying off the stifling vapor, that the boy had time to wonder why she made no effort to rise.

"Are you hurt?" he cried anxiously, running to her side.

"Never mind me until the fire is out."

"There is no more fire, an' I'm bound to mind you! Are you hurt?"

"It doesn't seem possible, my dear, an' yet I can't use either ankle or wrist. Of course the bones are not broken; but old people like me don't fall harmlessly as do children."

Seth was more alarmed now than when he saw the flames of the burning oil threatening the destruction of the building, and he dumbly wondered why Gladys did not make her appearance.

The first excitement was over, and now he had time in which to be frightened.

"What can I do? Oh, what can I do?" he cried, running to and fro, and then, hardly aware of his movements, he shouted loudly for Gladys.

"Don't waken her!" Aunt Hannah cried warningly. "If you can't help me there is nothing she can do."

"Ain't she in the house?" Seth asked nervously.

He feared Aunt Hannah might die, and even though she was in no real danger, to stand idly by not knowing how to aid her was terrible.

He failed to observe that Snip was no longer in the room; but just at that moment his shrill barking was heard in an adjoining apartment, and Seth knew the dog had gone to find his little playmate.

"You mustn't get frightened after the danger is

all over, my dear," Aunt Hannah said soothingly. "But for you the house would have been destroyed, and now we have nothing to fear."

"But you can't get up!" Seth wailed.

"That wouldn't be a great misfortune compared with losing our home, even if I never got up again," the little woman said quietly. "But I'm not going to lie here. Surely you can help me on to the couch."

"Tell me how to do it," Seth cried eagerly, and at that moment Gladys appeared in the doorway.

"Lean over so that I may put my arms around your neck," Aunt Hannah said, giving no heed to the girl's cry of alarm.

"She fell an' hurt herself," Seth said hurriedly to Gladys, as he obeyed the little woman's injunction. And then, as the latter put her uninjured arm over his neck, he tried to aid the movement by clasping her waist.

"If you can help me just a little bit we'll soon have her on the couch," he cried to Gladys, who by this time was standing at his side.

Aunt Hannah was a tiny woman, and the children, small though they were, did not find it an

exceedingly difficult task to raise her bodily from the floor.

Then Gladys lighted a lamp, and it was seen that, in addition to the injuries received by the fall, Aunt Hannah had been grievously burned.

"Yes, I'm in some pain," she said in reply to Seth's anxious questioning; "but now that the house has been saved I have no right to complain. Get some flour, Gladys, and while you are putting it on the worst of the burns, perhaps Seth will run over to Mrs. Dean an' ask if she can come here a few minutes."

"Where does Mis' Dean live?" the lad asked hurriedly, starting toward the door; and he was already outside when Gladys replied:

"It's the first house past the grove where Snip and I went this afternoon!"

Seth gave no heed to his lameness as he ran at full speed down the road; the thought that now was the time when he might in some slight degree repay Aunt Hannah for having given shelter to him and Snip, lending speed to his feet.

The Dean family had not yet retired when he arrived at the farmhouse, and, stopping only sufficiently long to tell in fewest possible words of what

had happened, Seth ran back to help Gladys care for the invalid, for he was feverishly eager to have some part in the nursing.

Aunt Hannah was on the couch with her wounds partially bandaged when the boy returned, and although her suffering must have been severe, that placid face was as serene as when he bade her good-night.

"Mis' Dean is comin' right away. What can I do?"

"Nothing more, my dear," the little woman replied quietly. "You have been of such great service to me this night that I can never repay you."

"Please don't say that, Aunt Hannah," Seth cried, his face flushing with shame as he remembered the past. "If I could only do somethin' real big, then perhaps you wouldn't think I was so awful bad."

"I believe you to be a good boy, Seth, and shall until you tell me to the contrary. Even then," she added with a smile, "I fancy it will be possible to find a reasonable excuse."

The arrival of Mrs. Dean put an end to any further conversation, and Seth was called upon to aid in carrying Aunt Hannah to the foreroom, in which

was the best bed, although the little woman protested against anything of the kind.

"I am as well off in my own bed, Sarah Dean. Don't treat me as if I was a child who didn't know what was best."

"You are goin' into the foreroom, Hannah Morse, an' that's all there is about it. That bed hasn't been used since the year your brother Benjamin was at home, an' I've always said that if anything happened to you, an' I had charge of affairs, you should get some comfort out of the feathers you earned pickin' berries. We'll take her into the foreroom, boy, for it's the most cheerful, an' she deserves the best that's goin'."

"You can bet she does!" Seth exclaimed with great emphasis; and then he gave all his attention to obeying the many commands which issued from Mrs. Dean's mouth.

When the little woman had been disposed of according to her neighbor's ideas of comfort, Seth was directed to build a fire in the kitchen stove; Gladys received instructions to bring all the old linen to be found; and Snip was ordered into the shed.

Aunt Hannah protested vehemently against this last order, with the result that the dog was ban-

ished to Gladys' chamber, and then Mrs. Dean proceeded to attend to the invalid without giving her a voice in any matter, however nearly it might concern herself.

Seth took up his station in the kitchen when other neighbors arrived, summoned most likely by Mr. Dean, and here Gladys joined him after what had seemed to the boy a very long time.

"How is she?" he asked when the girl came softly into the room as if thinking he might be asleep.

"Her hands and arms are burned very badly. Why, Seth, there are blisters as big as my hand, and Mrs. Dean says she suffers terribly; but the dear old woman hasn't made the least little complaint."

"That's 'cause she's so good. If I was like her I needn't bother my head 'bout what was goin' to happen after I died. It would be a funny kind of an angel who wasn't glad to see Aunt Hannah!"

"She'd have burned to death but for you."

"That ain't so, Gladys. I didn't do very much, 'cept throw the rugs an' my coat over her."

"She's just been telling Mrs. Dean that you saved her life, and the house."

"Did she really?" Seth cried excitedly. "Did she say it in them very same words?"

"Aunt Hannah made it sound a good deal better than I can. She said God sent you to this house to help her in the time of trouble, an' she's goin' to see that you always have a home here."

"Wasn't she kind'er out of her head?" Seth asked quickly. "I've heard Mother Hyde say that folks got crazy-like when they ached pretty bad."

"Aunt Hannah knew every word she was saying, and it's true that she might have burned to death if you hadn't been in the house, for I never heard a thing till Snippey came into my room barking."

"I hope I did do as much; but it don't seem jest true."

"Don't you think the house would have burned if some one hadn't put out the fire very quickly?"

"Perhaps so, 'cause the flames jumped up mighty high."

"And since she couldn't move, wouldn't she have been burned to death?"

"I hope so."

"Why, Seth Barrows, how wicked you are!"

"No, no, Gladys, I didn't mean I hoped she'd have burned to death; but I hoped I really an' truly

saved her life, 'cause then she won't jump down on me so hard when I tell her."

"Tell her what?"

"Why Snip an' I had to run away from New York."

"Is it something you're ashamed of?" Gladys asked quickly and in surprise.

Seth nodded, while the flush of shame crept up into his cheeks.

Gladys gazed at him earnestly while one might have counted ten, and then said, speaking slowly and distinctly:

"I don't believe it. Aunt Hannah says you're the best boy she ever saw; an' she knows."

"Did Aunt Hannah tell you that, or are you tryin' to stuff me?" And Seth rose to his feet excitedly.

"I hope you don't think I'd tell a lie?"

"Of course I don't, Gladys; but if you only knew how much it means to me—Aunt Hannah's sayin' what you claim she did—there wouldn't be any wonder I had hard work to believe it."

"She said to me those very same words——"

"What ones?"

"That you was the best boy she ever saw, an' it

was only yesterday afternoon, when you were splitting kindling wood, that she said it."

Then, suddenly, to Gladys' intense surprise, Seth dropped his head on his arm and burst into a flood of tears.

## CHAPTER VI.

### SUNSHINE.

MRS. DEAN had taken entire charge of the invalid and the house, and so many of the neighbors insisted on aiding her that Gladys and Seth were pushed aside as if they had been strangers.

At midnight, when one of the volunteer nurses announced that Aunt Hannah was resting as comfortably as could be expected under the circumstances, Gladys, in obedience to Mrs. Dean's peremptory command, went to bed; but Seth positively refused to leave the kitchen.

"Somethin' that I could do might turn up, an' I count on bein' ready for it," he said when the neighbor urged him to lie down. "Snip an' I'll stay here; an' if we get sleepy, what's to hinder our takin' a nap on the couch?"

So eager was the boy for an opportunity to serve Aunt Hannah that he resolutely kept his eyes open during the remainder of the night lest the volunteer nurses should fail to waken him if his services were

needed; and to accomplish this he made frequent excursions out of doors, where the wind swept the "sand" from his eyes.

With the first light of dawn he set about effacing so far as might be possible all traces of fire from the kitchen, and was washing the floor when Mrs. Dean came out from the foreroom.

"Well, I do declare!" she exclaimed in surprise. "Hannah Morse said you was a handy boy 'round the house, but this is a little more'n I expected. I wish my William could take a few lessons from you."

"I didn't count on gettin' the floor very clean," Seth replied modestly, but secretly delighted with the unequivocal praise. "If the oil and smut is taken off it'll be easier to put things into shape."

"You're doin' wonderfully, my boy, an' when I tell Hannah Morse, she'll be pleased, 'cause a speck of dirt anywhere about the house does fret her mortally bad."

Seth did not venture to look up lest Mrs. Dean should see the joy in his eyes, for to his mind the good woman could do him no greater service than give the invalid an account of his desire to be useful in the household.

"Is Aunt Hannah burned very much?" he asked, as the nurse set about making herself a cup of tea.

"I allow it'll be a full month before she gets around again. At first I was afraid she'd broken some bones; but Mrs. Stubbs declares it's only a bad sprain. It seems that she had a headache, an' came for the camphor bottle, when she slipped an' fell against the table. The wonder to me is that this house wasn't burned to the ground."

Then Mrs. Dean questioned Seth as to himself, and his reasons for coming into the country in search of work; but the boy did not consider it necessary to give any more information than pleased him, although the good woman was most searching in her inquiries.

Then Gladys entered the kitchen, and the two children made preparations for breakfast, after Seth had brought to an end his self-imposed task of washing the floor.

Mr. Dean came over to milk White-Face, and Seth insisted that he be allowed to try his hand at the work, claiming that if Aunt Hannah was to be a helpless invalid during a full month, as Mrs. Dean had predicted, it was absolutely necessary he be able to care for the cow.

The old adage that "a willing pupil is an apt one" was verified in this case, for the lad succeeded so well in his efforts that Mr. Dean declared it would not be necessary for him to come to the Morse farm again, so far as caring for the cow was concerned.

Very proud was Seth when he brought the pail of foaming milk into the kitchen with the announcement that he had done nearly all the work, and Gladys ran to tell Aunt Hannah what she considered exceedingly good news.

During the next two days either Mrs. Dean or Mrs. Stubbs ruled over the Morse household by virtue of their supposed rights as nurses, and in all this time Seth had not been allowed to see the invalid.

Gladys visited the foreroom from time to time, reporting that Aunt Hannah was "doing as well as could be expected," and Seth had reason to believe the little woman's suffering would now abate unless some unexpected change in her condition prevented.

The neighbors sent newspapers and books for Gladys to read to her aunt during such moments as she was able to listen, and while the girl was thus

employed Seth busied himself in the kitchen, taking great pride in keeping every article neat and cleanly, as Aunt Hannah herself would have done.

Then came the hour which the boy had been looking forward to with mingled hope and fear. He had fully decided to tell all his story to the little woman who had been so kind to him, and was resolved that the unpleasant task should be accomplished at the earliest opportunity.

It was nearly noon; the good neighbors were at their own homes for a brief visit, and Gladys came from the foreroom, where she had been reading the daily paper aloud, saying to Seth:

"Aunt Hannah thinks I ought to run out of doors a little while because I have stayed in the house so long. There isn't the least bit of need; but I must go, else she'll worry herself sick. She says you can sit with her, an' I'll take Snippey with me, for he's needing fresh air more than I am."

Just for a moment Seth hesitated; the time had come when he must, if ever, carry his good resolutions into effect, and there was little doubt in his mind but that Aunt Hannah would insist upon his leaving the farm without delay once she knew all his wickedness.

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Gladys did not give him very much time for reflection. With Snip at her heels she hurried down the road, and Seth knew he must not leave the invalid alone many moments.

Aunt Hannah's eyes were open when he entered the foreroom, and but for that fact he might almost have believed she was dead, so pale was her face. The bandaged hands were outside the coverings, and Seth had been told that she could not move them unaided, except at the cost of most severe pain.

"I knew you would be forced to come when Gladys went out, and that was why I sent her. We two—you an' I—need to have a quiet chat together, and there is little opportunity unless we are alone in the house."

Seth's face was flushed crimson; he believed Aunt Hannah had come to the conclusion that he must not be allowed to remain at the farm any longer unless he confessed why it had been necessary to leave New York, and his one desire was to speak before she should be able to make a demand.

"I ought'er——"

He stammered and stopped, unable to begin exactly as he desired, and the little woman said

quietly, but in a tone which told that the words came from her heart:

"You have saved the old home, an' my life as well, Seth. Even if I had hesitated at making you one of the family, I could not do so now, after owing you so much."

"Don't talk like that, Aunt Hannah! Don't tell 'bout what you owe me!" Seth cried tearfully. "It's the other way, an' Snip an' I are mighty lucky, if for no other reason than that we've seen you. Wait a minute," he pleaded as the invalid was about to speak. "Ever since you got hurt I've wanted to tell everything you asked the other day, an' I promised Snip an' myself that I'd do it the very first chance. If it——"

"There is no need of your tellin' me, my child, unless you really think it necessary. I have no doubts as to your honesty, and truly hope that your wanderings are over."

"We shall have to go; but I'm bound to tell the truth now, 'cause I know you think I was tryin' to steal somethin' when we were only goin' to run away so's you wouldn't know what I've done."

"My dear boy," and Aunt Hannah vainly tried to raise her head, "I never thought for a single minute

that you came downstairs for any other purpose than to leave the house secretly."

"An' that's jest the truth. Now don't say a word till I've told you all about it, an' please not look at me."

Then, speaking hurriedly lest she should interrupt him in what was an exceedingly difficult task, Seth told of the advertisement, of the counterfeit money he had unwittingly passed, and of his flight, aided by Teddy and Tim.

"I didn't mean to do it," he concluded, amid his sobs; "but I reckon I'd tried to get rid of it some time, 'cause I couldn't afford to lose so much money. Of course they'll put me in jail, if the detectives catch me, an' if I should be locked up for ever so many years, won't you let Gladys take care of poor little Snippey?"

"Come here an' kiss me, Seth," Aunt Hannah said softly. "I wish I could put my hand on your head! And you've been frightened out of your wits because of that counterfeit nickel?" she added when he had obeyed. "You poor little child! If you had told me, your troubles would soon have come to an end; but you must understand that in this world the only honest course is to atone for your

faults, rather than run away from them. The good Book says that 'your sins shall find you out,' and it is true, my dear, as true as is every word that has come to us from God. But I'm not allowin' that you have committed any grievous sin in this matter. Do you know, Gladys read your story in the paper before I sent her for a walk, and that is why I wanted to be alone with you."

Seth looked up in surprise which was almost bewilderment, and Aunt Hannah continued with a bright smile that was like unto the sunshine after a shower:

"Take up the newspaper lying on the table. I told Gladys to fold it so you might find the article I wanted you to read."

Seth did as she directed, but without glancing at the printed sheet.

"Can you read, dear?"

"Not very well, 'cause I have to spell out the big words."

"Hold it before my eyes while I make the attempt. There isn't very much of a story; but it will mean a great deal to you, I hope."

Seth was wholly at a loss to understand the little woman's meaning; but he did as she directed, and

listened without any great show of enthusiasm to the following:

Messrs. Symonds & Symonds, the well-known attorneys of Pine Street, are willing to confess that they are not well informed regarding the character of the average newsboy of this city, and by such ignorance have defeated their own ends. Several days ago the gentlemen were notified by a professional brother in San Francisco that a client of his, lately deceased, had bequeathed to one Seth Barrows the sum of five thousand dollars. All the information that could be given concerning the heir was that he had been living with a certain family in Jersey City, and was now believed to be selling newspapers in this city. His age was stated as about eleven years, and he owed his good fortune to the fact that the dead man was his uncle.

"It is not a simple matter to find any particular street merchant in New York City; but Messrs. Symonds & Symonds began their search by advertising in the newspapers for the lad. As has been since learned, the friends of the young heir saw the notice which had been inserted by the attorneys, and straightway believed the lad was wanted because of some crime committed. The boy himself must have had a guilty conscience, for he fled without delay, carrying with him into exile a small white terrier, his only worldly possession. The moral of this incident is, that when you want to find a boy of the streets, be careful to state exactly why you desire to see him, otherwise the game may give you the slip rather than take chances of being brought face to face with the officers of the law."

It was not until Aunt Hannah had concluded that

Seth appeared to understand he was the boy referred to, and then he asked excitedly:

"Do you suppose the Seth Barrows told about there can be me?"

"Of course, my dear. Isn't this your story just as you have repeated it to me?"

"But there isn't anybody who'd leave me so much money as that, Aunt Hannah! There's a big mistake somewhere."

"Do you remember of ever hearing that you had an uncle in California?"

"Indeed I don't. I thought Snip was all the relation I had in the world."

"Why did the man in Jersey City allow you to live with him?"

"I don't know. I had pretty good clothes then, an' didn't have to work, 'cause I was too small."

"Well," the little woman said with a sigh, as if the exertion of talking had wearied her, "I don't pretend to be able to straighten out the snarl; but I'm certain you are the boy spoken of in the newspaper story, for it isn't reasonable to suppose that two lads of the same age have lately run away from New York because of an advertisement. The money must be yours, my dear, and instead of being a

homeless wanderer, you're quite a wealthy gentleman."

"I wouldn't take the chances of goin' to see about it," Seth said thoughtfully, "'cause what we've read may be only a trap to catch me."

"Now, don't be too suspicious, my dear. I'm not countin' on your going into that wicked city just yet. I've sent for Nathan Dean, an' you may be sure he'll get at the bottom of the matter, for he's a master hand at such work."

Then Mrs. Dean entered to take up her duties of nurse once more, and Seth went into the barn, where he could be alone to think over the strange turn which his affairs appeared to be taking.

Gladys joined him half an hour later, and asked abruptly:

"What did Aunt Hannah say to you?"

"Why do you think she counted on talkin' to me?"

"Because I read that story in the newspaper. Then she wanted me to go out for a walk, and said I'd better ask Mr. Dean to come over this afternoon. I couldn't help knowing it was about you; but didn't say anything to her because Mrs. Dean thinks she oughtn't to be excited. Did you tell her why you and Snippey ran away?"

"Of course I did, an' was countin' on doin' that same thing the first chance I had to speak with her alone, though I made sure she'd send me away."

Then Seth repeated that which he had told Aunt Hannah, and while he was thus engaged Mr. Dean entered the house.

During the two days which followed, Gladys and Seth held long conversations regarding the possible good fortune which might come to the latter; but nothing definite was known until the hour when Aunt Hannah was allowed to sit in an easy-chair for the first time since the accident.

Then it was that Mr. Dean returned from New York, and came to make his report.

There was no longer any question but that it was really Seth's uncle who had lately died in San Francisco, or that he had bequeathed the sum of five thousand dollars to his nephew.

It appeared, according to Mr. Dean's story, as learned from Messrs. Symonds & Symonds, that Daniel Barrows had cared for his brother's child to the extent of paying Richard Genet of Jersey City a certain sum of money each year to provide for and clothe the lad. Mr. Genet having died suddenly, and without leaving anything to show whom Seth

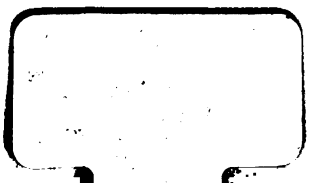
had claims upon, the boy was left to his own devices, while his uncle, because of carelessness or indifference, made no effort to learn what might have become of the child.

There were certain formalities of law to be complied with before the inheritance would be paid, among which was the naming of a guardian for the heir.

Aunt Hannah declared that it was her duty as well as pleasure to make the lame boy one of her family, and to such end Mr. Dean had several conferences with Symonds & Symonds, after which the little woman was duly appointed guardian of the heir.

There is little more that can be told regarding those who now live on the Morse farm, for the very good reason that all which has been related took place only a few months ago; but at some time in the future, if the readers so please, it shall be the duty of the author to set down what befell Aunt Hannah, Seth, Gladys, and Snip after the inheritance was paid.

That they were a very happy family goes without saying, for who could be discontented or fretful in Aunt Hannah's home? And in the days to come,

when Father Time lays his hand heavily upon the little woman, Seth knows that then, if not before, he can repay her in some degree for the kindness shcwn when he and Snip were fugitives, fleeing from nothing worse than a newspaper advertisement.

THE END.